



Concerning Tawhīd ¹

Imām `Alī al-Qārī

With commentary by Shaykh `Abdul Salām Shannār

Translated by Sidi Abu Hasan

`Alī al-Ushī says:

*yaqūl al`abdu fī badi' al- amālī
li-tawhīdin bi-nazmin kal la`ālī*

*The slave says, in the beginning of his dictation
Of a poem describing tawhīd, shining like a pearl²*

By 'slave' he [Imām `Alī al-Ūshī] means himself. That is, he is the slave of Allāh. He describes himself as a slave recognizing the sovereignty of Allāh as his Lord and thankful for this great gift [of being his faithful slave] and paying tribute to this noble attribute [*ubūdiyya*]. As someone has said:

*lā tadu'ūnī illā bi-yā`abdahā
fa-innahu ashrafu asmā'iyya*

*Do not address me except as 'her slave'
Because that is the best among my names*

Amālī is the plural of *imlā* (dictation). *La'ālī* is the plural of *lu'lu* (pearl). Tawhīd means to affirm the Unity of the Absolutely Independent Being. Here the verse means: I begin my dictation of a poem, with praise and declaration of the Unity of the Lord of the heavens. A poem, that is radiant as pure pearls strung together.

¹ `Alī al-Qārī, *daw al-ma'ālī*

² `Alī al-Ushī, *bad'il amālī*

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Concerning the Unity (*tawhīd*) of the Creator and its Proofs:

Know that proofs of *tawhīd* are plentiful in the Qurʾān for the people of knowledge. As Allāh says:

“And your God is One God. There is no other God except Him; He is the most Merciful, the Compassionate,”³

and he said:

“And know that there is no other God except Allāh.”⁴

The phrase of *tawhīd* is a very beneficial one in negating all other gods except Him alone. And also the negation of the right of absolute slavery to everyone except Him. Even though many disbelievers attest in the Unity of Lordship (*tawhīd ar-rububiyya*) as Allāh Taʾālā says:

“If you ask them, who created the heavens and the earth, they will say: it is Allāh,”⁵

and,

“When the messengers asked [their people] do you doubt in Allāh, the creator of the heavens and the earth?”⁶

³ Qurʾān, *Sūrat al-Baqara* 2:163

⁴ Qurʾān, *Sūrat Muhammad* 47:19

⁵ Qurʾān, *Sūrat Luqmān* 31:25

⁶ Qurʾān, *Sūrat Ibrāhīm* 14:10

Commentary by Shaykh `Abdul Salām Shannār

Some scholars have classified *tawhīd* in three categories:

- ***Tawhīd al-Rubūbiyya*** or the Unity of Lordship, Sovereignty.
- ***Tawhīd al-Ulūhiyya*** or the Unity of God (or Unity of Worship)
- ***Tawhīd al-Asmā wal Ṣifāt*** or the Unity of Names and Attributes

Tawhīd al-Rubūbiyya means to believe that Allāh is the only One who has the power of creation; and He alone has the [absolute] power to dispense in the universe, to grant and to withhold. Most polytheists towards whom the messengers were sent, particularly our prophet Muhammad ﷺ, believed in this type of *tawhīd*, as proven by the verse mentioned by al-Qārī above. Al-Qārī says: “*in spite of the recognition of this Unity by all the infidels ...*” even though many of them like Nimrud and Fir’awn did not accept this Unity of Lordship either. Therefore, my alteration ‘*most infidels ...*’ is more accurate.

Tawhīd al-Ulūhiyya means that only Allāh Ta`ālā can be worshipped; indicating that one can pray and beseech Allāh ﷻ alone. Therefore many polytheists remain infidels because of this reason, because they assign partners to Allāh ﷻ in worship.

Tawhīd al-Asmā wal Ṣifāt means that all the names and attributes of Allāh ﷻ are unique; that is nobody other than Allāh ﷻ can be associated with those names and attributes.

Thus, *tawhīd* or monotheism commanded by Allāh Ta`ālā is that we must believe that there is only one God to be worshipped, and the belief that only He is the Creator and the Destroyer; He alone has the power to grant and to withhold. And the belief that He is unique in His names and attributes.

The first person to classify [or invent] *tawhīd* into three categories as described above was Ibn Taymiyya. And along with this classification, [and based on it] he followed it up with invalidating intercession (*tawassul*) of messengers and pious people. He branded those who believe in intercession as polytheists and considered them out of Islām with the claim that such intercession invalidates the Unity of Worship (*tawhīd al-ulūhiyya*). He thus attributed polytheism (*shirk*) to pious predecessors and leaders among Muslim scholars because they allowed intercession. By doing this, he fell into a great mistake and manifest heresy. However, if we reflect upon this matter, we realize that such a classification is correct in principle even though false and invalid in its purpose.

Some scholars followed Ibn Taymiyya in his classification, like the author [‘Alī al-Qārī] who was also among those who accepted and permitted intercession. Thus he agreed with [Ibn Taymiyya’s] classification in principle and opposed it in its purpose. In fact, nobody agreed with him [Ibn Taymiyya] in his purpose [of invalidating intercession] except a very small minority which will not increase, because truth is manifest and falsehood shall be vanquished.

Some of our contemporaries have rejected this classification of *tawhīd* and some of them have attacked it in a heinous manner, branding that those who accept this classification are extremely ignorant. And accusing them of distortion and heresy in spite of the fact that scholars of all times, past and present, describe *tawhīd* in these words: ‘Unity of God, the Creator in Worship and the belief in the Unity of His Self, His Attributes and His Actions.’

Their saying: ‘Unity of God, the Creator in Worship’ is *tawhīd al-ulūbiyyah*; their saying: ‘and the belief in Unity of His Self and His Attributes’ is *tawhīd al-asmā wal sifāt* and their saying: ‘and His Actions’ is *tawhīd al-rubūbiyya*.

If we deliberate in this matter, we find that Ibn Taymiyyah did not depart from the classical definition as documented by earlier scholars, even though his objective in this classification was to use it as a point to reject intercession as I have mentioned earlier. It is quite probable that such attacks and vituperation concerning this classification are a result of the intention of Ibn Taymiyya’s classification, not the principle itself.

If we examine closer, we realize that such a classification is necessarily not bound by the intention (of denying intercession.) Because there are verses in the Qur’ān that clearly describe this kind of classification:

***“If you ask them who has created the heavens...,”* ⁷**

proves Unity of Lordship, Sovereignty. Concerning the Unity of God or Unity of Worship, the polytheists themselves acknowledged:

***“we do not worship them, except for the reason that they take us closer to Allāh.”* ⁸**

We are faced with a question here: If *tawhīd* is classified into three types, is it correct to say that the polytheists who accept only *tawhīd al-rubūbiyya* as monotheists?

The answer is obviously no. One cannot be considered a monotheist (*muwabbid*) just because they accept one part of *tawhīd*. Because Allāh Ta’ālā has called them polytheists and infidels, in spite of such acceptance. Therefore it is not permitted to call someone a monotheist unless he/she attests to all the three parts of *tawhīd* namely: *tawhīd al-rubūbiyya*, *tawhīd al-ulūbiyya* and *tawhīd al-asmā wal sifāt*.

If someone does not accept this ‘classification,’ it does not harm his/her faith in any way as long as he/she attests to the proper definition of *tawhīd* which includes all three ‘components’ of *tawhīd*. In fact, mentioning this classification is just an additional explanation.

I had to elaborate on this matter, because I have found many students confused about this issue and they remain so without resolving it. Rather, students may accept the first opinion they come across and advocate it adamantly – not knowing the intent of such classification. Therefore I thought that we must clearly define our position, and hence

⁷ Qur’ān, *Sūrat al-Ankabūt* 29:61

⁸ Qur’ān, *Sūrat al-Zumar* 39:3

the commentary. In summary: *tawhīd* can be described or classified as three categories along with the belief that *tawassul* or intercession is permissible.’

Allāh Ta`ālā knows best.

